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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the portrayal of mothers and fathers in Japanese and non-Japanese children's literature and how stereotypically they are depicted as role models. Japanese public libraries contain many translated foreign books, mostly Western in origin. For this study's purposes, 25 Japanese books, 25 translated books from English-speaking countries, and 25 translated books from non-English-speaking European countries were selected based on the following criteria: originally published after 1980; titles that obviously do not indicate the main character's gender, or books about parents; and each book by a different author. The first hypothesis, that mothers and fathers are still depicted in stereotypical situations, was supported. The second hypothesis, that mothers and fathers are depicted more often in stereotypical situations in Japanese books, was not supported; both Japanese and non-Japanese mothers were depicted as socially inactive, spending most of the day at home or in the neighborhood. English-speaking mothers were depicted most frequently as cooking or making pies and cakes. As far as jobs were concerned, 27 of the mothers from both kinds of books hold a job. Comparing Japanese and non-Japanese fathers, the number of occurrences between non-Japanese fathers and children was almost three times as many as the Japanese. Findings show that traditional stereotypical images still exist in children's literature. (Contains 6 references, 8 notes and 2 tables.) (NKA)

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Stereotypical Role Models in Western And Non-Western Children's Literature

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INTRODUCTION

"It is stockings and women that have become stronger after World War II" is the comment that is often heard in Japan. After the war, the Japanese government policy promoted democracy, which included giving women the right to vote, legislation of Equal Employment Opportunity Law, and encouraging female students to go to school. Japanese women seem to have taken advantage of these new opportunities. For example, the percentage of female students attending upper secondary school increased from 36.7% in 1950 to 95.8% in 1991 according to the survey conducted by Ministry of Education. However, Fanselow and Kameda (1994) warned that many issues related to gender remain to be tackled. They showed that, in 1991, the percentage of females among all students enrolled in universities was 28.3%, however, when it comes to junior colleges, 91.6% of the students population was female. Fanselow and Kameda (1994) suggest that the discrepancy between these percentages is a reflection on the old-fashioned notion that the goal of women's education should be to produce "good wives and wise mothers." Therefore, two-year college education is sufficient for girls.

This under-representation of female students in universities is also seen in university faculties. According to the Asahi Newspaper dated Jan. 25, 1999, female students studying for Masters and Doctoral degrees at Tokyo University consisted of 22.4% and 24.7% respectively. However, the percentages of female faculty members were 10.9% for assistant professor, 4.1% for associate professors and only 2.7% for full professors. Therefore,

women continue to be minority in universities and professional fields, reflecting dominant cultural norms and gender stereotypical notions (Fanselow & Kameda, 1994).

The gender stereotypes can be traced back to infancy, and they therefore greatly affect how children are socialized and educated. When a research company conducted a questionnaire in 1997 asking three hundred fifth grade students the five best future occupations they would like to engage in, boys answered 1. professional baseball players, 2. (tie) government workers, officer workers, and game software designers, and 5. professionals soccer players Girls answered 1. nursery school teachers, 2. (tie) kindergarten teachers, fashion designers, 4. nurses, and 5. radio announcers. Except professional baseball and soccer players, four year college education is needed to have these jobs for boys. However, all the jobs girls mentioned do not require four year college degrees in Japan. This supports the stereotypical notion that a two-year college or vocational technology school diploma is sufficient for women[1].

Another factor that reinforces gender stereotypes in Japan is evident in languages. Japanese language has so called "women's language" and "men's language. By using distinctive "women's language", women are constantly reminded to speak more politely and femininity. Other than grammar and neutral forms, females and males use different vocabulary, verb forms, and expressions as well as distinctive tone of voice[2]. "I" , for example, is expressed as "boku" for small boys or some men, "ore" for men exclusively, and "watashi" is for girls and women and a neutral form for both men and

women. Fanselow and Kameda state that, "Japanese parents continue to teach children to use language appropriate to their sex, and parents as well as teachers persist in correcting children - girls in particular - who use forms of speech thought to be reserved for the other sex," (1944, pp.52-53). There are also gender-related expressions such as "Onnano kusatta yona" – "rotten as womean", or "memeshii" – "whimpers like a girl" among many. It is socially accepted for boys and men to talk 'rough'. Girls, on the other hand, are encouraged to emphasize softness and femininity. Gender-specific language used with children serves to perpetuate the stereotypical norms from generation to generation.

Turner-Bowker (1996) stated that gender stereotypes are socially learned, and that books provide role models from which children learn certain behaviors, attributes, and values in the society at a very early age.

For the purpose of this article, I intend to investigate the portrayal of mothers and fathers in Japanese and non-Japanese children's literature and how stereotypically they are depicted as role models.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

In order to find the extent of gender stereotypes or gender-biased language and attitudes in children's literature and textbooks, most studies have shown overt variables such as the number of female vs. male main characters' personalities[3]. For example, among Japanese books, Fujieda (1983) found that out of 78 books, 82% of the main characters were male. In the 1998 article by Sugino, 45 of the main characters (64%) were male

among 70 randomly chosen contemporary Japanese children's books. Boys in those books were usually energetic, adventurous, mischievous, courageous, and honest. In depicting boys, Japanese female and male authors did not show much difference. However, in depicting girls, male authors displayed characteristics such as caring about friends and families, curious about cooking, sweet and timid. Female authors on the other hand, depicted them as adventurous, curious, dependable, imaginative but a little afraid, mean and self-centered.

Instead of finding over variables, Turner-Bowker (1996) investigated commonly used English adjectives for female and male characters in children's picture books. She found some of the most commonly used adjectives to describe females were beautiful, frightened, worthy and sweet. Adjectives such as big, horrible, fierce, great, brave, and proud were used to describe male characters. She concluded that "the results of the study provided evidence that gender categories are created and maintained through the use of differential stereotypes, this is clearly not reflected in children's literature," (p.477).

In my previous study, more Japanese female authors seem to be aware of gender issues and try to depict girls as less traditional and more adventurous, however, mothers and fathers in those books by both Japanese male and female authors still appear in stereotypical situations more often than not. For example, mothers appear in kitchens preparing meals, and fathers have something to do with work. To date, there has been no study of investigating stereotypical contexts in which mothers and fathers appear in

both Asian and non-Japanese countries. It is important to identify this because parents are children's closest role models whether in their real life or storybooks. Additionally, it is interesting to compare how differently or similarly they are depicted in each culture.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

The public libraries in Japan contain many translated foreign books for both children and adults. Most of them are of Western origin. For the purpose of this study, 25 Japanese books, 25 translated books from English speaking countries (18 American, 4 British, and 3 Australian), and 25 translated books from non-English European countries were selected based on the following criteria: 1. originally published after 1980, 2. titles that obviously do not indicate the main character's gender or books about parents, and 3. each book was by a different author.

The sample books were read by this author: the occurrences of characteristics were recorded in terms of places, situations and behaviors, and remarks were recorded in words. Data for Japanese books were collected in 1998, and for translated books from English speaking countries and Europe[5] in 1999.

Analysis

The researcher complied tabulated data relating situations to frequency of occurrence based on recorded data from records of each book. The 15 most commonly appearing situations for mothers in both Japanese and non-

Japanese samples are shown in Table 1 and the 15 most commonly appeared situations for fathers are shown in Table 2.

Hypothesis

One hypothesis in this study is that mothers and fathers are depicted in stereotypical situations such as mothers in a kitchen and fathers at work despite the fact that the number of female main characters is increasing[1].

A second hypothesis is that mothers and fathers are depicted more often in stereotypical contexts in Japanese books, compared to non-Japanese books. Though Turner-Bowker (1996) mentioned that traditional stereotypes are still seen in children's literature, it is supposed that they are seen less in non-Japanese books.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 show locations and /or behaviors in the left column and number of occurrences to the right. These tables depict the 15 most commonly occurring situations in which mothers and fathers appeared.

TABLE 1

15 Most Typical Contexts that MOTHERS Appear in 25 Japanese Books, 50 non-Japanese (25 books from English speaking countries, and 25 European)

Situations	Frequency			
	Japanese books	English books	European books	
Preparing meals	17	13	17	
Being in a kitchen	11	15	13	
Getting angry or scolding	10	15	13	
Making pies and cakes	6	16	1	
Cooking in a kitchen	6	14	1	
Smiling or laughing	7	11	6	
Doing laundry or cleaning	6	10	3	
Taking care of children when they get sick	8	8	3	
Growing vegetables and flowers	3	10	0	
Giving advice	3	10	8	
Worrying and sighing	2	10	9	
Working part time (no. of person)	5	5	0	
Working full time (no. of person)	4	5	8	
Kissing and hugging children	0	10	7	
Going (grocery) shopping	6	3	1	
Total	84	165	87	336

TABLE 2

15 Most Typical Contexts that FATHERS Appear in 25 Japanese Books, 50 non-Japanese (25 books from English speaking countries, and 25 European)

Situations	Frequency			
	Japanese books	English books	European books	
Working	15	11	23	
Giving advice	7	16	8	
Looking angry or serious	1	9	4	
Getting angry or serious	1	9	7	
Making or buying something for children	1	7	5	
Smiling or laughing	3	4	7	
Saying something nice to children	1	6	1	
Saying something firmly or definitely	1	5	3	
Going out with children	3	3	1	
Taking meals	1	5	1	
Helping with housework	0	6	1	
Talking about childhood memory	3	2	1	
Showing how to work	4	1	0	
Praising	1	3	2	
Driving cars (to work)	2	2	1	
Total	46	86	65	197

Other situations in which Japanese mothers appeared showed that: they had tears in their eyes, wore aprons, was practical, supported children emotionally and understood children's feelings. For English speaking mothers, other situations included: was good at math, fought against social injustice, ordered children, drove, talked like a friend, and hugged and kissed. Also, three English speaking mothers were depicted as forgetful, absent-minded and having a hard time grasping the situation(s) she was in. For European mothers, situations included: disagreed with husbands, yelled or told children off, tried to correct children's behaviors or asked them not to do things, worked hard, and asked children to do help with housework.

Japanese fathers in those books smoked, took a bath with his son which is a common custom in Japan, came home late from working so hard, and was a man of few words. English speaking fathers had a quarrel with his wife, participated in school activities, had a date with his girlfriend, talked a lot, and hugged their children and explained their feelings to children.

European fathers disagreed with wives, yelled at children, tried to communicate with them, and asked strange questions. In the three stories, fathers were absent because of divorces.

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to investigate the parental role models in children's literature across different cultures. The first hypothesis was that despite the fact that the number of female main characters in the previous

studies is increasing, mothers and fathers in these stories are still depicted in stereotypical situations. My hypothesis was supported in that the most frequent context in which fathers appeared was connected with work, whereas mothers were typically associated with housework such as cooking, making pies and cookies, and doing laundry or cleaning. The latter situations were recorded as many as 149 occurrences.

The second hypothesis was that mothers and fathers are depicted more often in stereotypical situations in Japanese books, compared to non-Japanese books. This hypothesis was not supported because there was no apparent difference in Japanese and non-Japanese children's books as far as stereotypical contexts were concerned.

Contrary to my second hypothesis, Japanese and non-Japanese mothers were depicted as socially inactive: spending most of the day at home or in the neighborhood. In case of English speaking mothers, especially in 18 American books, they were depicted most frequently in the situations where they were cooking or making pies and cakes. Compared to English speaking mothers, European mothers seemed more rigid with children telling children what to do, correcting children's behaviors, and yelling and telling children off. These situations totaled 25.

As far as jobs are concerned, 27 of the mothers from both kinds of books held a job but 10 were on a part-time basis. Of the 4 full time jobs that Japanese mothers had, two were teachers and two managed small businesses at home. Of the 13 full time jobs that non-Japanese mothers had, only one was a professional job (doctor), others were non-professional jobs,

and three jobs were not identified.

Comparing Japanese and non-Japanese fathers, the number of occurrences between non-Japanese fathers and children was almost three times as many as the Japanese. In four Japanese stories, children complained that their fathers were always busy working and had no time to take them on a trip during a summer vacation. One father was very quiet at home which is a typical Japanese image of fathers, especially of older ones as talkativeness is not encouraged among Japanese men. On the other hand, non-Japanese fathers in the stories spent much time communicating with their children, talking about serious matters or research, trying to sort out their feelings, and showing their emotions.

Physical contact such as hugging and kissing was seen 17times among non-Japanese mothers and 4 times among English speaking fathers and their children but not in Japanese stories. This reflects the cultural behavior in that in Japan when children become older than 5 or 6 years, parents start to have less physical contacts with them. It is socially learned and accepted behavior.

My research findings indicate that in both Japanese and non-Japanese stories, most mothers and fathers were seen in stereotypical situations where the mothers stay home and take care of the children and the fathers go out to work. We cannot deny that girls and boys pick up certain traits from birth and there are certain roles for men and women. However, the world is changing rapidly and there is a diversity in lifestyles and family styles. Should children's stories tell only the good, happy, traditional,

hopeful side of life in order to give children hopes and dreams? Or should children's stories tell the harsh, hard side of the world, too? Since parents are the closest role models for children, whether in real life or stories, I suggest language art teachers and writers should at least give children, especially Japanese children, more variety and diversity in lifestyles. Mothers can be depicted, for example, as working professionally, being good at computers or mechanics, or as re-entering school for other possibilities. Fathers on the other hand can be depicted as househusband, or hard-working fathers who spend a lot of time with families as well.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Stereotypes regarding gender and gender-biased notions deeply penetrate the Japanese society and they have affected our way of thinking and attitudes in not only everyday life but also in the areas as educating children.

The results in this study showed that traditional stereotypical images still exist in children's literature which was also pointed out in Turner-Bowker's study (1996). Although it was suspected that mothers and fathers would appear in gender stereotypical situations, the occurrences were not expected to be that high as those shown in the Tables 1 and 2. Results from the books from the English speaking countries were especially surprising in that mothers and fathers appeared in more gender-specific situations than the author had anticipated. Through these Japanese books and translated books from the Western countries, values, ideas and expectations of the

society will be transmitted to children and so will the stereotypical concept. Therefore, parents or teachers need to be careful in providing books to children at and outside of home.

The findings also offer a few pedagogical implications in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. Some educators may question why investigating children's literature has anything to do with college education or foreign language education. Since many students in my EFL classes have expressed their wishes to be teachers or writers in the future, I feel it is the responsibility of the present teachers to raise the issue of gender awareness.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, though the Japanese society has enjoyed so called 'equality of men and women' since the World War II, many Japanese are not still fully aware of issues related to gender. Past observations indicated this is also true of the majority of college students in my EFL classes and more true to female students. The important thing is how to transfer such information as found in this research to the students in order to raise their awareness on gender issues.

Jett-Simpson and Masland (1993) stated that teachers who would like to enhance their students' awareness on gender issue must first help students identify stereotypical or gender-biased words, expressions or concepts in the society. Then students can explore the issues deeper by investigating textbooks or children's books or any kind of literature.

In my EFL classes, to identify stereotypical concepts in the Japanese society, I asked students to complete the real story of the young Japanese woman who wished to be in orthopedics in the near future without telling

the students what she wished to be. Of 70 students, 35 wrote that she would like to be or study to be an orthopedics doctor, but most of other 35 students wrote that she would like to marry someone in orthopedics or would like to work at orthopedics' office as an assistant. Instead of explaining about gender issues right away, the students were asked to draw pictures with simple English sentences which have typical occupations considered either for men or women. For example, the sentences included, 'The doctor advised my father to stop smoking,' and, 'The flower shop clerk gave me extra flowers.' 99% of the students identified the doctor in the sentence as male, and less than 40% for the flower shop clerk. Only after looking at the results from these two activities did students realize stereotypical notions in the Japanese society. Some other activities to help students be aware of and explore gender issues include: write a life story of the young Japanese woman in the first activity and discuss why they think their stories end up the way they write them; presenting 'What if ' questions or follow up stories or changing the characteristics of well-known folk tales to make up a gender free story.

The research findings of my study have shown that stereotypical parental role models are seen in the Japanese and Western children's books. However limited, these findings will help language arts teachers realize that we need to work harder at introducing children to stories with less stereotypical depictions of parents and more variety in lifestyles. They will also help college students in EFL classes be aware of the issues and pass this awareness on to the students they may teach someday.

Notes:

[1] This data was shown in Asahi Newspaper dated Oct. 15, 1997.
[2] They also differ depending on who you are talking to, as we have an honorific form and humble form, and whether you are in a formal situation or an informal one.
[3] More detailed information is provided in Sugino's article.
[4] In my previous study (1998), it was 64%, compared to that of 82% in Fujieda's study (1983).
[5] Most of them were translated from original languages into Japanese. They are 8 German, 3 Russian, 3 French, 5 Scandinavian, 2 Dutch, 2 Austrian, 1 Italian, and 1 Spanish.

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